

1601 PLACING SIBLINGS TOGETHER/MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS

Chapter: **Out-of-Home Placement**

Section: **Finding a Placement**



New Hampshire Division for Children, Youth and Families Policy Manual

Policy Directive: **09-44**

Approved:

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Maggie Bishop".

Maggie Bishop, DCYF Director

Related Statute(s): [RSA 169-C](#)

Related Admin Rule(s):

Related Federal Regulation(s): [471](#)

Related Form(s):

Bridges' Screen(s) and Attachment(s):

Sibling relationships are emotionally powerful and critically important not only in childhood but over the course of a lifetime. Siblings in the same home can provide natural support to each other and a sense of stability and belonging. Continuity of sibling relationships enhances their sense of safety and well-being.

Purpose

Children and youth who must be placed away from their families should be placed together unless the serious specific needs or the safety of one or more siblings justify separating them. The decision to separate siblings should be based on a carefully documented and reviewed determination that such separation is necessary. When that is not possible, strong connections between siblings must be maintained.

Definitions

"Resource homes" mean relative and foster adoptive homes.

"Sibling" means a child related to another child by blood, adoption or through a common or biological parent or a child who has a sibling relationship with a non-related child.

Policy

- I. The sibling bond is important, separate from the bond between parent(s) and child(ren). They share the same history, heritage and biology. The sibling relationship is unique and must be fostered in its own right. Separation of siblings is a separate loss that needs to be addressed.
- II. Decisions about placing siblings together should be made when the child first comes into care. If placement together does not occur at this time, the sibling placement and visitation will be revisited at each point in the case until placement together is made or the permanency plan is achieved.
- III. Key decisions about placing siblings together and maintaining connections are made when:
 - A. child first comes into foster care;
 - B. case plan is developed;
 - C. permanency planning team meets;
 - D. dispositional hearing is held;

- E. administrative reviews are held;
- F. permanency hearing is held; and
- G. treatment team meetings (if applicable).

IV. Decision Making in Sibling Placements

- A. If siblings must be separated at the time of initial placement or a time thereafter, efforts to place siblings together must occur (and be documented) as soon as possible.
- B. When a sibling remains in the home and another is removed connections between the siblings must be developed to maintain the sibling relationship.
- C. The Permanency Planning Team (PPT) must review siblings placed separately.
- D. If the plan for a sibling group is to keep siblings apart, the CPSW Supervisor at the 30-day PPT meeting must contact the Assistant Administrator for approval and notify the Permanency Program Specialist.
- E. The Assistant Administrator must approve an adoption plan when:
 - 1. children are in the same home but the parents do not wish to adopt all members of the group.
 - 2. children are not in the same home but each caretaker wishes to adopt.
 - 3. siblings are not in the same home and we are selecting an adoptive family.

V. Prior to selecting adoptive parent(s)

- A. Conduct a thorough assessment of the sibling group as a whole as well as each individual child.
- B. Look at the importance of sibling connection not only at the present but also for the child throughout his/her life. Although a child may not be close to a sibling now, consider future implications if they are separated.
- C. The child must be included in the decision-making process whenever possible.
- D. The best interests of the child must be discussed by persons who have played an important role in the children's' lives. These may include current caretakers, relatives, CASA, therapists, counselors and physicians.
- E. When there is no other alternative examine the pros and cons and document the reasons for and against separating siblings.
- F. If siblings must be separated, immediately develop a plan that will ensure that positive connections will continue.

- G. If frequent visitation or other ongoing interaction between siblings does not occur, documentation must be entered into Bridges explaining how contact would be contrary to the safety or well-being of the siblings.

VI. Supporting Sibling Placements/Connections

- A. When siblings cannot be placed together, facilitating regular visitation is critical to maintaining these relationships.
- B. Determine what needs to be done to support contacts between the siblings.
- C. Place children in close proximity.
- D. Arrange for regular visits.
- E. Arrange for other forms of contact which may include: letters, phone calls, e-mail, etc.
- F. Involve resource homes in planning.
- G. Plan joint outings or camp experiences.
- H. Arrange for joint respite care.
- I. Maintain member(s) of the sibling group in a home where they have long- term ties and attachments.
- J. Include extended families or other supportive resources in sibling visitation when appropriate.

VII. Factors Associated With Placing Siblings Apart

- A. Specific needs of one or more of the siblings justify separation.
- B. Safety risks associated with placing the siblings together.
- C. A relative will consider placement for only one member of a sibling group.
- D. Foster/adoptive parent does not wish to adopt all siblings.

Procedures:

- I. When a child is removed from their home, the CPSW or Resource Worker will work with the birth parents, relatives or collaterals to be familiar with the siblings needs.
 - A. This preparation may include but is not limited to gathering the following information:
 - 1. Child information sheet,
 - 2. Parent(s) social study,
 - 3. Medical information,

4. Educational needs,
 5. Siblings relationship to include safety issues to be considered during placement,
 6. Physical environment needed for siblings, and
 7. Placement history.
- B. The CPSW and their Supervisor will work with the Resource Worker to locate a placement provider, including relatives, who would be able to care for the siblings based on their identified needs.
 - C. The birth parent(s) will be provided with the contact information of the resource family (i.e. address, telephone number, email address etc.) within 1 business day of the child's placement as long as the safety of all involved is assured.
 - D. Siblings need to be placed in close proximity to each other if a resource family has not yet been identified to take all siblings.
 - E. Ensure that visitation and contact between the siblings are maintained on a regular basis.
 - F. Attempts to keep siblings together must be documented in the case contact logs.
- II. If the CPSW, Supervisor and Resource Worker are unable to identify a resource family to meet the needs of the sibling group, the following will take place:
 - A. A Child and Youth Matching Profile will be filled out and distributed statewide to search for an alternative resource family that would be able to accept the sibling group.
 - B. When PPT meetings, Administrative Case Reviews, Treatment Team Meetings or Court Reports and Case Plans are held or written, documentation must be made and entered into Bridges regarding the efforts to place the siblings together.
 - C. Specific safety issues will be identified as needed and if barriers are identified, a plan will be submitted to address these barriers.
 - D. At each team meeting or court hearing the CPSW will document what efforts have been made to address these barriers and to recruit a resource family for the siblings.
 - III. Any decision to keep siblings separated will be made during the PPT meetings and must be approved by the Assistant Administrator. (Refer to Policy Section II above.) The CPSW will provide a copy of the PPT documentation to the Assistant Administrator until the siblings are reunited or adopted.